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ABSTRACT

Once a librarian has made the decision to conduct a study of the economic community, several interrelated questions must be addressed: What is meant by the term "economic community" and what is known about it? What will be the objectives of the survey? Which businesses, industries, and services should be included? Who will conduct the survey? How will the survey results be implemented? A survey of the economic community is, in effect, a market analysis. To insure success of the survey, goals must be established early, to set the appropriate lines of inquiry. A brief economic profile of the community, gathered from easily available sources, can be helpful in determining which of the various types of enterprises offer the best field for investigation, if time and money constraints preclude a total survey. If the library staff does not have sufficient expertise to plan and conduct such a survey, consultants are available from marketing research firms, local academic institutions and library associations. Survey results will not be useful unless they generate recommendations, preferably in the form of a program proposal, which can be subjected to review and eventual implementation of improved library services. (Author/SL)

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DEFINING AND IDENTIFYING THE SPECIFIC COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED

by Raymond M. Holt

Meredith Willson said it all in one line of the song which opened his show, *Music Man*. You'll recall that the curtain rises on a group of salesmen traveling across the great state of Iowa at the turn of the century. They are voicing concern about the activities of one salesman, masquerading as Professor Harold Hill who peddles music instruments to unsuspecting customers and then flees town before they find out that his credentials are as fake as his ability to play any of the band instruments he sells. But one hard-headed anvil salesman predicts total failure for the Professor, protesting, "But You've Got to Know the Territory!"

As librarians, we too must "know the territory" - in this case, the characteristics of those who make up the economic community. All too often our knowledge of this market place is about as limited as that of Professor Harold Hill's, and sometimes we seem just about as willing to depend upon the charisma of the library to attract businessmen as Professor Hill relied on his personality to sell picolos, cornets and trombones! In spite of oft-repeated admonitions to conduct community studies, we tend to formulate our concepts of user needs within the confines of our booklined offices. I know, because I've been guilty of this offense, also.

The idea of applying the techniques of community study has particular relevancy. Community study implies a special, conscious effort to assemble, analyze and interpret a variety of data which will bring about a better understanding and serve as a sound basis for action.

Once a decision has been made to conduct a study of the economic community several interrelated questions must be addressed. These include:

1. What is meant by the term "Economic Community and what do we know about it?"
2. What will be the objectives of the survey?
3. Which businesses, industries, services, etc., should be included?
4. Who will conduct the survey?
5. How will the results of the survey be implemented?

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Usually, these questions must be resolved in context with one another over a period of time since each is tied to the others. However, for the next few minutes, let us consider them separately.

1. What is meant by the term "Economic Community?"

Our first task is to get a firm grasp on the concept of the "Economic Community." To some this term may be unfamiliar and imprecise. While I know of no formal definition, we are using the term "Economic Community" here to include all phases of activity by which individuals earn a livelihood. Thus the "Economic Community" includes what we commonly refer to as business, industry, services, retail trade, finance, etc.

2. What will be the objectives of the survey?

All too many studies are conducted with insufficient forethought, resulting in a soft focus product which never quite comes to grips with essential problems and issues. Therefore, without attempting to predict findings, define methodology, or dictate conclusions, a statement of study objectives should begin to emerge at the earliest possible time. While they may be refined during the planning process, these goals set up the targets which determine the path of the arrows of inquiry.

A survey of the economic community is, in effect, a market analysis like those conducted by industrial firms contemplating the saleability of a proposed new product. There are a number of things you must know if the venture is to be successful. For instance:

a. What is the market's potential? Who will buy it? This, in turn, involves identifying the pertinent characteristics of the potential users, the type of information and/or services needed, the intensity of that need, and what competition may exist.

b. How can the product be tailored to best suit the market?

c. What methods of product promotion are most apt to reach the potential customer?

d. What affect will this product have on the library in terms of its staff, collections, services, facilities, budget, etc?

e. How can evaluative procedures be built-in so that the product can be tested periodically and modifications effected when necessary?

3. Who should be included in the survey?

Determining who should be included in the survey is dependent upon several considerations, including the nature of the community and the time and funds available for the survey. You may find it helpful at this point to construct a brief profile of the community by assembling relatively easily available information. Among the bits of information needed are population figures, characteristics of the labor force, and the general nature of the economic community.

Frequently, the local Chamber of Commerce or Board of Trade will make available compilations of their membership divided into categories such as manufacturing, retail trade, finance, etc., and may indicate the number of employees in each firm. This information provides an important insight into the size and nature of business and industrial firms.

While it is desirable to include the entire economic community in the survey, lack of funds or time may preclude this. The brief economic profile will then be helpful in determining which of the various types of enterprises seem to offer the best field for investigation. The same information will be useful in structuring and refining the survey objectives and will serve as excellent background for those making the survey.

4. Who will conduct the survey?

Recognizing the complexities of survey work and the importance of obtaining results which are objective and reliable, you will have to face the question of whether or not sufficient expertise exists within your staff to formulate and conduct the survey. If such talent does exist, how will you assure them adequate time and freedom to produce the study within a reasonable period? Will a staff-conducted study be considered creditable by those who will be involved in approving future programming.

On the other hand, if you prefer outside assistance or find it necessary, where do you turn for help? There may well be research capabilities available through local academic institutions - particularly where schools of business administration, economics and public administration exist. Numerous firms engaged in marketing research are just about as close as your telephone directory - although finding the right one to do your survey may take a bit more effort.

For those interested in library consultants, help can be had through the offices of the Reference and Adult Services Division, sponsors of this program today, and the Library Administration Division. Reading the reports of surveys previously conducted by consultants will provide additional background for selection. While we do not have time to explore this subject fully, the question of who will be responsible for making the survey is an extremely important one which must be resolved before the project can reach the final stages of planning.

5. How will the results of the survey be implemented?

Finally, there comes the question of how the results of the survey will be implemented. All too many surveys are languishing on library shelves today because provisions were not made for using the results in a systematic and meaningful way. Therefore, implementation should be part and parcel of the study package if it is to have real impact.

While the findings of a survey may be interesting, they are of little use until they result in recommendations. These, in turn, are apt to be more valuable when placed within the context of a program proposal which can be subjected to review, modification and eventual implementation. To assure a survey report of this character, the necessary requirements and directions must be written into the objectives and incorporated into the instructions given those responsible for the actual study.

At this point, some of you may be wondering, "Why go to all of this trouble?" "Why a survey at all?" "Why don't we save all the time, money and energy which would be expended on a survey by purchasing some specialized books and periodicals which seem to reflect the interests of our local businessmen and supplement them with a few loose-leaf services?" "After all, businesses share the same common denominators of personnel, finance, purchasing, sales, etc., so why not build on these known characteristics rather than becoming involved in a complicated survey?"

Unfortunately, it is exactly this approach which has been responsible for failure in so many libraries inaugurating special services to the economic community. While businessmen do, indeed, have much in common, it is our knowledge of the subtle differences which seems to determine success or failure. To help

any of those who may still be in doubt, let me tick off a few of the values which can result from a well-organized and conducted survey:

a. Our decisions can be based on an objective market analysis of the needs, habits and desires of the intended recipients of the service rather than our suppositions.

b. Direct contact with the potential user will yield a more accurate and richer understanding of user need than can be derived from secondary sources. The survey can be tempered and honed to produce a body of fairly precise information. Decisions to add or drop services based on such a foundation are almost certain to be better than those determined from broad generalizations and observations.

c. An increased awareness on the part of both the respondent and the library serves an important public relations function. On the one hand, the library has gained significant information of the exact nature of the businessman's needs, while the user - or potential user, has developed an appreciation for the library's sincere interest in determining his information requirements.

d. When properly structured and managed, the survey provides a singular opportunity to create a greater awareness of the library as a valuable and convenient resource. This lack of awareness on the part of businessmen appears to be the number one barrier to library utilization. Providing the survey techniques are appropriate and well carried out, this increase in awareness is a bonus worth many times its cost.

e. Finally, a coherent program can be structured on the firm recommendations of a survey aimed at specific targets and armed with objective guides for periodic evaluation. Projects founded on this sort of foundation have much greater opportunity for success because they are based on authentic conditions and deal with real rather than assumed characteristics of the user and his information requirements.

CONCLUSION.

If the survey has been well conceived, objectives carefully spelled out, and the study pursued in a workmanlike manner, the results should repay the costs many times over. The economic community will be familiar ground instead of terra incognita for you will have taken the first all-important steps toward following that anvil salesman's admonition, "You've got to know the territory!"